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## Preface

Since the formation of National Unity Government, it has faced internal conflicts, and the internal disputes rose from time to time. The bloody explosion in Kabul followed by several other security incidents last month, once again, paved the way for and refueled the internal disputes.

In the heights of oppositions within and outside the government, several senior officials of the government formed the “Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan” in Turkey and announced their specific demands from the government. In the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, you would read about the objectives, impacts and other aspects of this coalition.

In the second part of the analysis, we have analyzed the tenuous Kabul-Islamabad relations and the issue of China’s mediation in these relations. In the past, the deteriorated relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan were occasionally repaired for sometimes by such mediations, but since China has vast influence over Pakistan, the question is how much can China’s mediation be effective? Also, why is China interested in mediation between Afghanistan and Pakistan?

## Does anti-government coalition mean salvation of the country?



Since the past several weeks, the Afghan government is confronting political oppositions both within and outside the government. It was due to these political oppositions that three Afghan political parties, Junbish-e-Mili, Wahdat-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Islami formed the “The High Council of Coalition for Salvation of Afghanistan” in General Dustom’s house in Turkey.

The fundamental demands of the new alliance (NUG) were full implementation of the NUG agreement, restoration of the powers of the first Vice President, reformation of security sectors, elimination of imbalance between the ministries as well as provinces, preventing the expansion of insecurity to the North, dismissal of the National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar, and etc<sup>1</sup>.

The announcement of the coalition followed by various reactions within the country. The Presidential Palace said that it would welcome any scheme to bring reforms but added that all parties had played a part in the creation of current problems because the members of this alliance were also part of the government

<sup>1</sup> Pakhto News, «د افغانستان د نجات د ایتلاف عالی شورا اعلامیه» [The statement of the High Council of Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan], see online:

<http://www.pakhtonews.com/index.php/39-breaking-news/471-2017-06-30-10-50-03>

and the government's achievements and failures were directly related to their performance as well.<sup>2</sup> The head of Mashrano Jirga Fazel Hadi Muslimyar stated that the founders of the new coalition have to resign.<sup>3</sup>

What is the purpose of this anti-government coalition is it becoming an opposition force or it means to serve the personal interests? What are the motives behind such alliance? Do these anti-government coalitions mean the salvation of the country? These questions and other similar questions are discussed here.

### **The anti-government coalition and oppositions**

It is a principle of the governance in the democratic and liberal societies to form alliances and opposition groups out of the government's framework. They monitor government policies and deeds and criticize it. Apart from the western democratic principles, in Islam, this behavior is considered a better Jihad and the individuals' ethical duty. Therefore, except for the tyrant and dictator regimes, almost in all other societies the presence of such opposition groups is accepted.

In the past one century of the Afghan history, the constitutionalism movement was the first opposition group. After it came "Weekh Zalmyan" and then in the decade of democracy, various ideological, political and even military coalitions and oppositions were established in the country.

In the past 15 years, occasionally such anti-government political alliances were formed and were annihilated by their very founders. Even during the NUG, it is not the first anti-government coalition, before this, the Council for Protection and Stability of Afghanistan under Ustad Sayyaf and some other small alliances were formed within the NUG's tenure.

<sup>2</sup> Kabul News, «د افغانستان د نجات عالي شورا د ملي يووالي حکومت هوکړه لیک بشپړ عملي کېدل غواړي» [the High Council of Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan demands the complete implementation of the NUG agreement], read it here:

<http://www.kabulnews.af/pashto/index.php/afghanistan/11155-2017-07-01-14-16-09>

<sup>3</sup> Azadi Radio, «مسلمیار: د نوي اېتلاف جوړونکي باید له دندو استعفاوې ورکړي» [Muslimyar: those who has formed the recent coalition must resign], 10 Saratan 1396 solar year, read it here:

<https://pa.azadiradio.com/a/28589644.html>

## What are the objectives of the new coalition?

The coalition that was formed in Turkey have pointed out a number of issues in their statement, which were mentioned above, but here we have pointed out the possible aims of this coalition:

**Opposition:** in all over the world the oppositions of the governments are not in the government and even if they were at first part of the government, they resign due to their principle disagreements and become the government's opposition groups. It never happens that a group be a part of the government and in the meanwhile its opposition and claim the achievements of the government to be theirs' and the failures of the government to be of others'. Therefore, the current coalition is not an opposition alliance. The main point to be considered about this coalitions is the execution of the NUG agreement and the restorations of the powers of the First Vice President. The two pivotal stakeholders of the NUG agreement are the President and the Chief Executive. The implementation of the deal was the Chief Executive's demand in the past and is his demand now as well. It is not surprising that neither the Chief Executive nor his first deputy but his second deputy expresses such a demand.

**The collapse of the government:** since the formation of the NUG, a number of movements were formed to overthrow the government such as the call for Loya Jirga, and the demand to form an interim government, etc. However, these movements are yet to produce an outcome. Although the Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan could have been demanded in the political meetings within the country and it was demanded in these meetings as well, the follow up of such demands by all other political parties, except Hezb-e-Islami, raises many doubts. The question is, in the current circumstances that the government's tenure is about to come to an end, can they overthrow the government? Nevertheless, to a greater extent, the answer to this question will be negative.

**Safeguarding personal interests;** if one evaluates the formation and the demands of the Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan, one will conclude that it is formed to serve the interests of the parties and individuals that have formed it. The fact that the first Vice President is involved in Ishchi's case and that Ata

Mohammad Noor and that Dr. Abdullah Abdullah are engaged with each other in the internal politics of Jamiat-e-Islami supports the argument mentioned above.

### **Will the Coalition for the “Salvation of Afghanistan” be able to save the country?**

After a review of the past four decades in the country, we can say that all the coalitions and groups that were formed to protect the country did not have desiring outcomes. The various Jehadi groups and the Bonn (2001) agreement are its examples. The coalition formed in Turkey is not an exception either and cannot save the country due to the following factors:

**First;** the current situation in the country is not emerged because of the NUG, and it is rather rooted back in the past four decades. However, the main factor is the developments in the past 15 years. Most of the players and members of the current coalition are the architects and stakeholders of the regime in the past 15 years.

**Second;** three parties of the coalition (Junbish-e-Mili, Wahdat-e-Mili, and Jamiat-e-Islami) are themselves the principal pillars of the current regime. The head of Junbish-e-Mili is the first Vice President. The head of Wahdat-e-Mili is the second deputy of the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive of Jamiat-e-Islami is the governor of Balkh and the Chief Executive and the Afghan Foreign Minister, and Minister of Economy are members of Jamiat-e-Islami. The fact that these senior officials only blames the President and some others for the current situation in the country, to a larger extent, seems irrational and false.

**Third;** in most of the countries in the world, there exists the principle of Cabinet Collective Responsibility. Based on this principle, once the decision is made, everyone has to support it in front of the public even if they disagree with the decision personally. If their disagreement was very fundamental, they resign to show their opposition.

**Fourth and the most important;** in its statement, the new coalition has demanded the dismissal of some people and changing policies. Such moves would

not have desiring outcomes unless they are not replaced with entirely new personalities. Given the current circumstances, this coalition will demand the placement of its people, those who are repetitive individuals in the past fifteen years.

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## The Chinese mediation in tensed Afghan-Pak ties



Since a month, at the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Conference, President Ghani in his meeting with the Chinese President showed eagerness to organize a trilateral meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. Later, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs traveled to Kabul on 24 June 2017 to discuss China's involvement in improving relations between Kabul and Islamabad. In his meeting with the Afghan President, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs said that China was ready to help create a practical mechanism to improve relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In addition to China, the United State seeks to improve these relations as well. Last week, a delegation of the US senators headed by the head of US Senate's committee of military services John McCain came to Kabul just after his visit to Pakistan. This delegation has discussed the issue of Afghanistan with Pakistani officials and has clearly communicated to Pakistani officials that the presence of Haqqani Network and other "terrorist" groups in its soil was intolerable and that Pakistan must change its stance in this regard.



In their meeting with the Afghan President, the delegation of US Senate members suggested a joint operation, under a third country's observation, against armed groups across the Durand line, which was accepted by the Afghan government.

Here you would read about the tenuous relations between Kabul and Islamabad, China's willingness to mediate between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and whether China will be successful in it or not?

### **The tensed Kabul-Islamabad ties**

In the past one and half decade, the Kabul-Islamabad relations experienced the most ups and downs during the NUG. After the formation of the NUG, relations between the two countries improved unprecedentedly. However, after a while, tensions between the two nations escalated to the levels that led to clashes between the forces of the two countries in the broader border regions.

After the attack on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, a Sufi shrine in Sindh province, Pakistan claimed that the assault was orchestrated in Afghanistan and, hence, closed its border checkpoints with this country. Although after the reopening of the borders, through the consecutive travels of Pakistani delegations including Pakistani spy chief's visit to Kabul, efforts were made to improve relations between the two countries, these efforts had failed to produce any desiring outcomes yet and, once again, the Afghan government has accused the Pakistani intelligence of being involved in deadly attacks, particularly the attack in the diplomatic area of Kabul.

Still, days after the incident mentioned above, the Afghan President said in the Kabul Process Conference, where Pakistan's representative was also present, that the Afghan government is seeking to find an effective way to negotiate with Pakistan. He called on Pakistan to clearly state their demands from Afghanistan. In the ceremony to introduce the new head of the High Peace Council, the Afghan President said, "Afghanistan does not want peace from Pakistan but it wants

peace with Pakistan.”<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, in the absence of the powerful countries’ mediation, the improvement of relations between the two nations seems unlikely.

### China’s inclination towards mediation

China is a country that is interested in mediating in the Afghan peace process. The Afghan government believes that sincere cooperation of Pakistan in the peace process can bring peace in Afghanistan and since China has strong relations with both Kabul and Islamabad and is a powerful country in the region, this country (China) is trying to mediate in improving ties between the two countries. In his meeting with the Afghan President, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs said that a stable Afghanistan was necessary for the stability in the region and that in his visit to Pakistan he would demand the Pakistani officials to show their good will in improving their political relations with Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

The question is why China is interested in mediating between Afghanistan and Pakistan? There are several reasons for China to be inclined towards mediation:

**First;** China is concerned about its internal security, especially the security of its Xinjiang province. Given the importance of the geographical situation of Afghanistan and being its neighbor, China realizes that stability in Afghanistan is essential for the stability of the whole region and especially China. If Afghanistan is insecure and unstable, this insecurity and instability can extend to China as well.

**Second;** China realizes that in the absence of security in the region, the implementation of its major economic projects (China and Pakistan’s Economic Corridor and Silk Road) will be impossible. Therefore, China is making efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region.

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<sup>4</sup> Radio Azadi, «افغانستان اکنون پاکستان را همکار صلح نه بلکه طرف صلح می خواند» [Afghanistan now considers Pakistan as a party of peace rather than a cooperator], 11 Saratan 1396:

<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28590782.html>

<sup>5</sup> Presidential Palace, «رئیس جمهور غنی با وزیر امور خارجه چین دیدار کرد» [President Ghani met the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs], 3 Saratan 1396 solar year:

<http://president.gov.af/fa/news-china-mofa>

**Third;** China has also realized that its interests in the region will still be threatened if relations between Kabul and Islamabad were not improved. If relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan improve, China's regional interests will also be guaranteed.

### Can China mediate?

China's preparedness in mediation between Kabul and Islamabad has created hopes that tensions between the two countries will decrease. However, since China's presence in the quadrilateral meetings (between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US), these meetings did not have desiring outcomes, now the question is to what extent China's mediation will improve the long-term relations between the two countries?

Without any doubt, China is Pakistan's closest strategic economic and political partner in the region. In 2011, Massod Khan, the then Pakistan's Ambassador to China had described the China-Pakistan relations to be sweeter than honey, stronger than iron, and deeper than the deepest oceans.<sup>6</sup> China can utilize its close ties with Pakistan.

Besides that, during the past one and a half decade, China's role in the region has considerably increased, and its relations with Pakistan have also expanded. Currently, Chinese companies are implementing various projects in different part of Pakistan, and China has invested about \$57m in Pakistan. In the meanwhile, this country is also confronted security threats as well. For instance, in May 2017, the two Chinese Language teachers were abducted and then killed in Quetta city of Pakistan. Therefore, China can pressurize Pakistan to preserve the mutual economic interests.

On the other hand, Pakistan is in favor of expanding China's relation and engagement in Afghanistan because, from Pakistani perspective, China can limit

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<sup>6</sup> Etilaat-e-Roz, «آیا چین می تواند به وساطت میان افغانستان و پاکستان کمک نماید؟» [Can China help in mediation between Afghanistan and Pakistan?], 10 Saratan 1396 solar year, read more here:

<http://www.etilaatroz.com/49246>

Indian influence in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is also looking forward to the more proactive role of China in this country because the economic growth and role of China in the region are increasing and this country can contribute to Afghanistan in areas of economy, politics and even security.

The Chinese mediation can be efficient to the improvement of relations between the two countries in the short run. However, for warm relations between these two countries, in the long-term, there is a need for broader regional and global pressures to persuade Pakistan to undertake real cooperation in the Afghan issue.

In the past, these relations were repaired several times as a result of such mediations but since these relations are linked with the security in the region, with the intensification of security situations, these relations are deteriorated once again. Currently, there are hopes that given the vast Chinese influence in Pakistan, China will get Pakistan to treat the Afghan issue honestly and these relations will fundamentally improve.

### **Afghanistan-China-Pakistan cooperation areas**

Currently, taking the situation of the region into consideration, the interests of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan are linked to various aspects, and China is moving towards a more active engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan which requires good relations between Kabul and Islamabad as well.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are making efforts to attract Chinese investments in various projects including TAPI, CASA-1000, the railway corridor between the five countries, etc. China also realizes that, given its strategic location, Afghanistan can be influential in the successes of its two projects; “One Belt, One Road” and “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”.

Afghanistan, which is a natural transit route, can align most of its infrastructural projects with the “One Belt, One Road” project. In the meanwhile, Kabul needs comprehensive relations and engagement with China because China has the means to invest in most of the economic, transit, and trade projects as well as Afghanistan’s untapped resources. However, an essential point about the regional

interest of these countries and success in these aspects is stability and security in the region which requires joint efforts and cooperation of these countries.

The end

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**Note:** Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

